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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the personal, academic, and social factors associated with high school graduation and non-graduation among Hispanics. Subjects for this study included 56 high school graduates, 58 high school equivalency (GED) students, and 50 dropouts from high schools in the South Bronx (New York). The following measurement instruments were used: (1) the High School Study Questionnaire; (2) the Life Event Scale-Adolescents; and (3) the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The following findings are discussed: (1) the dropout group had a lower self-concept than the graduate and GED groups; (2) dropouts had more children than the other subjects; (3) graduates had lived and studied more years outside the mainland than the GED group; (4) there were no significant differences in life events among the groups; (5) graduates were less likely to be involved with drugs, alcohol, and crime than the GED and dropout groups; and (6) graduates had a better academic record and behavior history than the others. These research findings suggest that given the plight of many low-income U.S. Hispanics, the more time spent living and studying on the mainland the more likely a Hispanic youngster with low self-esteem will not graduate from an inner city high school. A list of 13 references is included. (JS)

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Graduating and Dropping Out of High School in the South Bronx

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to evaluate the factors associated with high school graduation and non-graduation among Hispanics. Subjects included: 56 graduates, 58 high school equivalency (GED) students and 50 dropouts. Two standardized instruments on self-concept and life events and a detailed questionnaire were used. Group testing occurred.

Results indicated that the dropout group had a lower self-concept than the graduate and GED groups. Also, dropouts had more children than the other subjects. Graduates had lived and studied more years outside the mainland than the GED group. There were no statistical differences in life events among the groups. Graduates were less likely to be involved with drugs, alcohol, and crime than the GED and dropout groups. Graduates had a better academic record/behavior history than the others.

These research findings suggest that given the plight of many low-income U.S. Hispanics, the more time spent living and studying on the mainland the more likely a Hispanic youngster with a low self-esteem will not graduate from an inner city high school. Early parenting is also likely.

Educational reform must be a top priority. Collaboration among diverse groups and the educational system is critical. Early intervention of at-risk students is also urgent. Negative "labeling" of program participants should be avoided.

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Graduating and Dropping Out of High School in the South Bronx

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Lehman College, Bronx Institute
Dropout and School Completion: Urban Perspectives Conference
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This presentation is based on my doctoral dissertation Factors Contributing to High School Graduation among Hispanics. The discussion will center on the personal, academic, and social differences in three low-income groups - high school graduates, high school equivalency (GED) and dropouts. More specifically, the relationship between the family of origin, individual background, social support systems, environmental stress and the successful completion or non-completion of high school will be identified with respect to Puerto Rican/Hispanic youth in the South Bronx and other nearby communities. The South Bronx which is in the 21st congressional district is the poorest in the nation.

Why was it important to conduct such an investigation? Currently, there is a paucity of studies on Hispanics and on the characteristics of this dropout population. There is also a strong need for this empirical data to better understand the dropout problem among Hispanics. Research is particularly needed which focuses upon Hispanic youth as they tend to leave school with greater frequency than Blacks and Whites (Fligstein and Hernandez, 1985; Moore and Pachon, 1985; Rumberger, 1983 and the High School and Beyond Study as cited in Kolstad, 1987). Collins and Gampert (1988) report that in 1986-87 New York City statistics demonstrated that Hispanics constituted 29.5 percent of the NYC's high schools' total enrollment, but accounted for 39.3 percent of the dropouts. Hispanics were overrepresented by approximately percentage points among dropouts. The dropout rate was higher for Hispanics than for

other New York City students. The 1987-88 New York City Board of Education statistics which were not available at the time of this investigation are almost identical. Hence, the most recent data indicates that Hispanics are still overrepresented by nearly 10 percentage points among dropouts in New York City (Opperman and Gampert, 1989). Additionally, my research was important since Hispanics may become the largest minority student group in New York State by the end of the next decade (Learning in New York, 1986). Hispanics also comprise the fastest-growing ethnic group in the nation (Valverde, 1987).

In summary, this study would provide a conceptual framework on the Hispanic dropout problem and the contributing factors that lead many Hispanics to complete high school and others to drop out. Findings would reveal those interactions between youngsters, families, their school and peers which encouraged graduation. The results of this investigation would also enable educators, psychologists, and community planners to implement creative strategies in diversified settings.

Literature Review

The question of why Hispanic students drop out in such great numbers remains largely unanswered. The review of the literature reports that there are internal (in-school) and external (out-of-school) reasons for leaving school (Ochoa et al, 1987). The most salient factors will be highlighted briefly. In-school factors are as follows: poor/failing grades, grade retention, lack of teacher and counselor support, disciplinary problems - attendance, cuts, lateness, lack of extra-curricular activities, large and/or dangerous schools, irrelevant curriculum, disinterest in school, dislike of teachers, weak interpersonal relations, and lack of minority role modes.

Out-of-school factors include: low-socio economic status (SES), large family size, single parent household, pregnancy/ parenting, poor self-esteem, ethnicity/race, substance abuse, trouble with the law, lack of parental support, low level of parental education, siblings who drop out, a lack of positive role models in the community, outside mainland birth, length of mainland residence, and language dominance.

Thus, various family, personal, and school-related variables may affect early school leaving. Given this end, this research explored the following hypotheses.

Hypotheses

First, it was expected that the total self-concept scores would be higher for the graduate (HSG) group than for the high school equivalency (GED) and dropout (DROP) groups. It was also expected that the GED group would have higher self-concept scores than the dropouts. Five of the six subscales of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale were predicted to show group differences as outlined for total score: 1. behavior; 2. intellectual and school status; 3. anxiety; 4. popularity; and 5. happiness and satisfaction. Inter group differences in physical appearance and attributes were not expected. Second, it was expected that the graduate group would have a lower life events score than the GED and dropout groups as measured by the Life Events Scale - Adolescents. Third, it was expected that graduation would be related to a lack of pregnancy/parenting status such that graduates would have less likelihood of being pregnant and/or being a parent that the GED and dropout groups. Fourth, it was expected that length of residence outside the mainland United States would lower for the graduates than for GED students and dropouts. Fifth, it was expected that education outside the mainland would be lower for the graduates than for the GED and dropout groups.

Other research questions included the differences among the three groups in academic record/school behavior such as grade retention, self-reported high school average, attendance, class cuts, and suspension. The second question focused on the differences among the groups in their involvement of drugs, alcohol, and crime.

Hypotheses three to five and the research questions were measured by the High School Study Questionnaire which was based on two previous studies with Hispanic stayers, at-risk students and dropouts. The High School Questionnaire included subject identification information and measures of theoretical constructs: Personal History, Educational History, Family Educational History, Support/Encouragement and other information. The questionnaire consisted of 66 items and was available only in English.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were classified as 56 high school graduates (HSG), 58 high school equivalency (GED) students, and 50 dropouts (DROP). Ninety one percent of the subjects were residents and/or students of the South Bronx. Nine percent came from similar low income areas, East Harlem or Washington Heights. The sample consisted of 84 females and 80 males. There was a tendency for graduates to be females (n=35) versus males (n=21). The subjects ranged from 16 through 22 years. The mean ages were: HSG - 18.8; GED - 18.7 and DROP 18.9. Slightly over 81% of the subjects were born on the mainland. Graduates and dropouts had a similar proportion (77% and 74%) in their place of birth outside the mainland, Puerto Rico/other Hispanic country.

Nearly 43% of the HSG and 38% of the dropouts describe themselves as Puerto Rican/Hispanics. Approximately 92% of the GED students were born on the mainland and almost 59% describe

themselves as NeuYorican (Puerto Rican New Yorkers).

Graduates were drawn from the freshman class at a local community college and a nearby graduating high school class. Most GED students were enrolled in two high school equivalency programs in the area. Dropouts were friends or siblings of other subjects or participants in neighborhood youth programs. All subjects were proficient in English. Graduates had finished high school on the mainland or were expected to graduate the following month. The GED and dropout groups had attended and dropped out of a junior or senior high school on the mainland.

Procedures

All subjects were volunteers recruited by the researcher at the sites previously specified. Data collection was conducted during four months at all sites by the researcher. The study was briefly explained to the subjects who were encouraged to ask questions and reassured of their confidential participation.

Every subject was given a packet of forms which included the instrumentation: The High School Study Questionnaire, The Life Event Scale-Adolescents and The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. Each test was explained and subjects usually worked individually in completing their forms. The entire group administration took about an hour. All subjects received ten dollars for their efforts.

Results

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA's) chi-squares, and discriminate analyses were used as the analysis strategy.

First Hypothesis

Self-Concept and High School Graduation

It was found that dropouts had lower total self-concept scores than graduates and GED students. These findings suggest that a Hispanic youngster who feels better about him/herself will finish school or enroll in an equivalency (GED) program. There was also other statistical differences among the groups in self-concept subscales. These differences were as follows: dropouts had a lower behavior self-concept ($F=19.25$; $df=2.159$, $p < .001$). The GED group had a higher self-concept score in physical attributes and appearance ($F=4.51$, $df=2,161$, $p < .01$.) than the graduates and dropouts. There was also evidence that the dropouts were less happier and satisfied than the GED and graduate groups ($F=2.90$; $df=2,161$, $p < .05$). There were no statistical differences among the groups in the popularity nor anxiety self-concept scales.

Second Hypothesis

Life Events among the Groups

The hypothesis that graduates would have a lower life event score than the GED and dropout groups was not supported. There were no statistical differences among the groups in life events or environmental stress.

Third Hypothesis

Early Pregnancy and Parenting Status

It was hypothesized that high school graduation would be related to a lack of pregnancy/parenting status. Using chi-squares, this hypothesis was tentatively supported for pregnancy status. Thus, there was some indication that graduates were less likely to be pregnant or had a pregnant partner. Also, graduates rarely have a parenting status ($F=11.7$, $df=2,161$, $p < .001$). Dropouts had more children than both GED and graduate groups.

Fourth Hypothesis

Residence outside the mainland United States

The fourth hypothesis posed that length of residence outside the mainland would be lower for graduates than for the GED and dropout groups. It was also expected that there would be no differences between the GED and dropout groups. The hypothesis was not supported. Though the overall ANOVA was significant ($F=5.16$; $df=2.161$; $p < .01$), graduate group had longer residence outside the mainland than the GED group. Therefore, contrary to predictions, longer residence outside the mainland seems to effect high school graduation for some low-income Hispanics.

Fifth Hypothesis

Education outside the Mainland United States

It was hypothesized that the GED and dropout groups would have more education outside the mainland than the graduates. The hypothesis was not supported. Though the overall ANOVA was significant ($F=3.55$, $df=2.161$; $p < .05$), graduates had significantly more education outside the mainland than the GED group. Findings can be interpreted such that for some low-SES Hispanics the more years of education on the mainland the greater the likelihood of dropout behavior.

Previous Academic and Behavior Background. The data indicated that there were differences among the groups in academic record/school behavior with the GED students and dropouts experiencing more grade retention, a lower self-reported high school average, and poor attendance. The GED and dropout groups also had cut classes and were suspended more often than the graduates. The results of the present study found that 22% of the GED group (n=12) gave was failing or had low grades while 14% (n=8) listed school was boring as their first reason for dropping out of school. Sixteen percent of the dropouts (n=8) cited school was boring and ten percent (n=5) said they did not get along with their

teachers as their main reason for leaving school.

Involvement with Drugs, Alcohol, and Crime. Previous findings reveal that youth involved with substance use and crime are potential dropouts. This study demonstrated that significant differences existed among the groups in drug use , alcohol use ($p < .01$) and crime ($p < .05$) with graduates being less involved with drugs, alcohol, and crime that GED and dropout groups. There was no statistical difference between the GED and dropout groups.

There were other many statistical differences among the groups. Some will be listed here: GED students and dropouts had longer residence on the mainland than graduates. Graduates had more frequent church attendance when compared to GED and dropout groups. The graduates rarely "hung out" after school as did the other two groups. The graduate group had more friends that finished school than the GED students and dropouts. Graduates had better use of English grammar as rated by this researcher in comparison to the GED and dropout groups. GED students and dropouts self-reported little or no reading and writing skills in Spanish.

Other statistical differences included the following: The graduate group tended to have a mother with a high school diploma whereas other groups did not. The GED group reported that their father only had an eight grade education. The graduates indicated a very low income (welfare, SSI, or no steady employment) while growing up, whereas the GED students said they came from a working class background. Overall, graduates had more teacher, family, maternal and peer support to complete school than the GED and dropout groups. The GED group had more sibling support to finish high school than the other two groups. School staff never encouraged the graduates to drop out of school yet GED students and dropouts were sometimes encouraged by teachers and other school

staff to leave school.

As a result of statistical analyses, it was determined that education on the mainland was the main contributor to dropout rates among Hispanics. It seems that longer exposure to schools in a low income community which mostly provides an inferior education results in premature school leaving for Hispanic youth. Other variables such as length of residence outside the mainland, self-concept, parenting status, and life events, in that order also affect the completion of high school. The present study suggests that the more years Hispanics with a low self-esteem reside and study in New York City the more tendency for deteriorating education and social outcomes.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study was based on a small sample of graduates, GED students, and dropouts. Further research is needed to investigate how generalizable these findings are. Testing did not occur with those proficient only in Spanish. Neither individual interviews nor subject attitudes were incorporated in this study, nor actual school records reviewed. Intelligence tests were not administered, however, the use of these instruments with minorities has been under debate for several decades now. Dropouts were recruited mainly from organized programs or were siblings or friends of other subjects. Moreover, the attribution of causality can not be determined. It is never known if dropouts have a low self-concept and proceed to leave school before graduation or if it reverse. Also, The Life Events Scale - Adolescents measured life events or environmental stress for the preceding year not an accumulation of life experiences. These were the limitations in the investigation.

Given these findings, educational reform should be a key platform in low-income Hispanic communities. Innovative approaches

might include mentoring programs with upper classmen, alumni, and others, as well as private corporation involvement via jobs, vocational training, and volunteer experiences which might provide cash or credit. Other school-related solutions focus on student tutoring programs among high schoolers or with younger students. This would improve the student's own academic achievement and self-concept. New creative ventures might incorporate the use of video in traditional and nontraditional methods such as Puerto Rican/Hispanic culture, art poetry, and theater, thus strengthening cultural identify and hopefully enhancing self-esteem. Exercise programs, professional Hispanic guest speakers, and activities that provide positive reinforcement for students are also needed.

The main conclusions to be drawn from these analyses are that, first, dropouts have a lower self-concept than graduates and GED students. Second, dropouts were more likely to have children than graduates. There was a trend indicating a lower pregnancy status for the graduates than for the GED and dropout groups. Third, graduates had resided and studies more years outside the mainland than the GED group. Fourth, there were no statistical differences in life events or environmental stress among the groups. Also, graduates were less likely to be involved with drugs, alcohol, and crime than the GED and dropout groups. Graduates had a better academic record/behavior history than the other subjects. Additionally, there were statistical differences in family, maternal, sibling and peer encouragement to finish school as well as school encouragement to drop out among the 3 groups.

Special programs for target groups; adolescent parents, troubled youth, and families who require support services should also compliment the school-related solutions. Moreover, teacher training concerning student characteristics (The New York Regents Working Paper, 1987) and a linguistically and culturally relevant curriculum (Reyes, 1987) are extremely important due to the student

population found in low-income schools. Parent and community empowerment would also benefit the students and eventually the society, alike. Further research that affects policy making is recommended as Hispanics become the fastest growing minority group. In essence, collaboration among schools, parents, the public and private sector will stem the dropout numbers among Hispanics. Early identification of at-risk students is also urgent. Negative "labeling" should always be avoided.

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